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ABSTRACT

In order to test the hypothesis that dogmatism is related to the understanding and appreciation of editorial satires, 116 University of Georgia speech students read and reacted to three editorial satires (two by Art Hoppe and one by Art Buchwald) arranged in booklets in three different orders. Students were asked to choose from a list of five statements following each satire the one which stated the thesis intended by the writer. Students also rated each satire on a semantic-differential type scale ranging from "extremely funny" to "extremely unfunny." The last two pages of each booklet contained a short form dogmatism scale. Analysis of data showed that (1) ability to perceive correct theses of satires differing in subject matter seems to be related to low dogmatism, (2) dogmatism might interact with the topic of a satire in determining ability to perceive satirical intent, and (3) appreciation--humor ratings--of satires seems to result from an interaction of dogmatism and satirical topic. (Tables of findings and a list of references are included.) (JM)

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DOGMATISM: A FACTOR IN THE UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF EDITORIAL SATIRE?

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DOGMATISM: A FACTOR IN THE UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF EDITORIAL SATIRE?

A paper presented at the convention of the Speech Communication Association, December, 1974, Chicago, by Charles R. Gruner, Univ. of Georgia

Experimental studies of humorous or satiric stimuli as persuasion[1] indicate that such stimuli are often not persuasive because their theses are not understood. Carl[2] and Kendall[3] especially studied understanding of political cartoons and found them often misunderstood. And Kendall found that ability to recognize the thesis of a political cartoon was related to youthfulness and years in school. Three other studies[4] indicate that political partisanship is probably related to appreciation of political humor and/or satire understanding when the opposite party is the victim of the humor/satire.

The present study was conducted as a result of Surlin's findings[5] that dogmatism was a factor in viewer reaction to the characters in tv's "All in the Family" and Miller and Bacon's finding[6] that open-mindedness was associated with the ability to recognize the humorous point in a risque and subtle Playboy cartoon. The hypothesis was that dogmatism is related to the understanding and appreciation of editorial satire.

Procedures: One hundred and sixteen U. of Georgia speech students took part. In the Fall Quarter of 1973 they were handed offset-duplicated booklets to read and react to. The booklets contained three editorial satires, two by Art Hoppe and one by Art Buchwald, arranged in three different orders. Following each satire the subjects were asked to choose

from a list of five statements which they thought was the thesis intended by the writer of the satire. The Ss also rated each satire on a semantic differential-type scale bounded by "Extremely funny" to "Extremely unfunny." A cover page provided standardized directions, and the final two pages of the booklet comprised a short-form dogmatism scale developed by Troldahl and Powell, originally, for use in field studies.[7] So: data gathered included for each satire the Ss' knowledge of its thesis and a measure of its appreciation, and the Ss' dogmatism scores.

Results. Ss' data were scored and arranged into four groups: those who correctly indicated the thesis of all three satires (the "3-gp."), those correct on only two (the "2-gp."), those correct on only one (the "1-gp."), and those correct on none (the "0-gp."). The dogmatism scores of the four groups were analyzed for significance of difference by a one-way analysis of variance, and produced the data in the following table:

	3-gp.	2-gp.	1-gp.	0-gp.	
n	15	33	47	21	F = 4.08,
Mean Dogmatism Score	27.40	32.12	33.00	34.19	$p < .01$

Results indicated that the dogmatism scores were related to understanding of the satires. Testing for significant differences between means two at a time by the conservative method of Scheffé[8] revealed only that the 3-gp. differed significantly ($p < .05$) from both the 1-gp. and the 0-gp., but fell short of significance in difference from the 2-gp. ($F = 6.08$, with

F = 8.07 for $p < .05$ required by the Scheffé method).

To check whether dogmatism's effect upon satiric thesis perception depended upon the particular satire, the data were separated by editorial satire to produce the following:

Editorial	Those Perceiving Mean	n	Those Not Perceiving Mean	n	Difference	t	p
"Nixon's Shoes"	30.55	70	34.00	46	3.45	2.55	<.02
"SANE Capital Punishment"	30.07	32	32.55	83	2.48	1.63	<.10
"The George and Tom Papers"	31.10	60	32.91	56	1.81	1.35	NS

As the above data show, the differences in mean scores were all in the predicted direction, but only in the case of "Nixon's Shoes" was the mean difference significant. That for "SANE Capital Punishment" approached without reaching significance. Apparently, whether dogmatism affects understanding of a satire is probably affected by some aspect of the particular satire involved, probably "subtlety" and maybe even subject matter.

Another comparison of high- and low-dogmatics was made. Ss were divided into a group of 23 low-dogmatics scoring one standard deviation below the mean (X = 32.35) and one of 29 high-dogmatics one s.d. above the mean. Data were analyzed by chi-square to produce

Editorial:	Nixon's Shoes		George and Tom		SANE Cap. Pun.	
Dogmatism gp.:	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Number of Subjects who:						
did perceive thesis:	15	19	14	15	8	8
did not perceive thesis:	14	4	15	8	21	15
	$x^2 = 5.41$		$x^2 = 1.46$		$x^2 = .31$	
	$p < .02$		NS		NS	

These data show that only in the case of the anti-Nixon editorial was perception of thesis not independent of dogmatism: the low-dogmatics perceived the anti-Nixon thesis significantly more often than did the high-dogmatics.

Humor ratings of each of the three editorials by the four groups as determined above (high-dogmatics who perceived thesis, high-dogmatics who did not; low dogmatics who perceived thesis, low-dogmatics who did not) were subjected to one-way analysis of variance. Only the ratings of "Nixon's Shoes" were found to differ significantly ($F = 5.41$, $p < .02$). Comparing means 2 at a time by the Scheffé method revealed two significant differences: Low-dogmatics/perceiving rated the humor higher than did the high-dogmatics/not perceiving ($F = 9.26$) and higher than did the high-dogmatics/perceiving ($F = 8.58$) with $F = 8.40$ required for $p < .05$.

Discussion. The usual cautions in generalizing from the data of this experimental study are in order, plus special note that the "funniness" scale used was a single 7-step scale and the short-term dogmatism scale, while economical of time, suffers in sensitivity and reliability. But it would seem to this writer that the following conclusions are tentatively supported by this study:

1. Ability to perceive the correct theses of satires differing in subject matter seems to be related to low dogmatism.
2. The chi-square evidence hints that dogmatism might interact with satire topic in determining ability to perceive satirical intent. Dogmatism seems to have affected perception

of the "Nixon's Shoes" thesis most; perhaps high dogmatism causes one more to distort information about a "conservative" figure such as Mr. Nixon?

3. Appreciation (humor ratings) of satires seems to result from an interaction of dogmatism and satirical topic. It is obvious more research in this area is needed.

References

Mr. Gruner is Professor of Speech Communication, University of Georgia. He expresses thanks to his colleagues Katrina Douglass and Lydia Vaughan for their assistance in gathering data for this study, and to Mr. "Pete" Sarver for scoring and arranging it.

[1] These studies are reviewed in Charles R. Gruner, "An Annotated Bibliography of Empirical Studies of Laughter-Provoking Stimuli as Communication," ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, accession number ED 074 533. A more complete review will be in a forthcoming book by the writer, Understanding Laughter: The Psychology and Communicative Function of Wit and Humor (Chicago: The Nelson-Hall Co., in press), and his chapter, "Wit and Humor in Mass Communication," in Humor and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Applications, to be published in England by John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., around September, 1975.

[2]LeRoy M. Carl,"Editorial Cartoons Fail to Reach Many Readers," Journalism Quarterly, 45 (Summer, 1968), 633-35.

[3]Dr. Kathleen Kendall, unpublished field study conducted during Spring, 1973, Albany, N.Y.

[4]R.F. Priest, "Election Jokes: The Effects of Reference Group Membership," Psychological Reports, 18 (1966), 600-2; R. F. Priest and J. Abrahams, "Candidate Preference and Hostile Humor in the 1968 Elections," Psychological Reports, 26 (1970), 779-83; Charles R. Gruner, "Satire as a Reirforcer of Attitudes," paper presented at the SCA convention Dec. 28, 1972, Chicago.

[5]Stuart H. Surlin, "The Evaluation of Dogmatic Television Characters by Dogmatic Viewers: 'Is Archie Bunker a Credible Source?'" paper presented at the ICA convention, April, 1973, Montreal.

[6]Gerald R. Miller and Paula Bacon, "Open- and Closed-Mindedness and Recognition of Visual Humor," Journal of Communication, 21 (June, 1971), 150-9.

[7]Verling C. Troldahl and Frederic A. Powell, "A Short-Form Dogmatism Scale for Use in Field Studies," Social Forces, 44 (1965), 211-4.

[8]George A. Ferguson, Statistical Analysis in Psychology and Education, 2nd Ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1966), pp. 295-7.